



Nov. 29, 2018

Statement From SFWMD Re: Florida Wildlife Federation Seeking to Delay Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir Project

On Nov. 8, the South Florida Water Management District (District) Governing Board approved a land lease directed by state law. This action immediately terminated agricultural operations on 560 acres in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) and gave the District full control to land within the central footprint of the EAA Storage Reservoir Project. On Nov. 14, the District began critical site work on the 560 acres needed to expedite the project while following the will of the Legislature and allowing agricultural operations to continue on the remaining land until such time as the land in question is necessary for construction. This is a project that all parties agree is necessary for addressing damaging Lake Okeechobee discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries and sending additional, clean water south.

A legal challenge filed yesterday by the Florida Wildlife Federation is not at all surprising. Trying to prevent the District from expediting and completing the EAA Storage Reservoir is consistent with the Florida Wildlife Federation's prior actions. This is the same group that filed another lawsuit against the state and Sen. Joe Negron - the biggest champion of the EAA Storage Reservoir - seeking to block the Florida Legislature from using Amendment 1 funds to build restoration projects. If ultimately successful in their attempt, the Florida Wildlife Federation's actions could halt the District's restoration efforts on approximately 1 million acres of public land acquired using more than \$1.5 billion of taxpayer dollars.

Furthermore, this group celebrated a judge's ruling restricting the use of Amendment 1 funds on lands long held on the public's behalf. An attorney, representing the Florida Wildlife Federation, even brazenly told news outlet Politico that "a large number of Everglades restoration projects, such as a proposed reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee, no longer can be funded with Amendment 1 revenue."

The Florida Legislature represents 21 million Floridians. The Florida Wildlife Federation touts a membership of 14,000 people. The Florida Legislature directed that construction of the EAA Storage Reservoir be expedited using Amendment 1 funds and compromised that the land remain agricultural before reservoir construction is ready to proceed. With the District Governing Board approving an agreement to allow crucial geotechnical and rock staging work to begin on the reservoir this month, why would a special interest group attack the very funding stream and legislative compromise needed to expedite the reservoir desired by so many?

The next step in the legal process is for the District to evaluate the Florida Wildlife Federation's legal petition. Florida law requires that the District carefully review the legal petition to determine whether it substantially complies with Florida's Administrative Procedures Act.

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The South Florida Water Management District is a regional governmental agency that manages the water resources in the southern part of the state. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. Our mission is to protect South Florida's water resources by balancing and improving flood control, water supply, water quality and natural systems.



SFWMD Newsroom

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